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ABSTRACT

The idea for the organization that later became the American Forensic Association (AFA) was conceived at a meeting of debate coaches at a tournament at the State University of Iowa in the fall of 1948. This group felt that something should be done to meet the growing needs and interests of high school and college debate coaches. The group organized five regional associations, fought to save extracurricular speech activities in the high schools, and developed the AFA Tournament Calendar and the AFA Register to establish a means of communication for the members. One of the big issues of the 1950s was the propriety of debating both sides of the proposition. The second great debate of the 1950s focused on the 1954-1955 national intercollegiate debate proposition. The Great Debate about Debate began in the fall of 1954 concerning the issue of a Nebraska Teachers college's refusal to allow its students to debate the recognition of Red China. By 1953 the AFA was an established, growing and vibrant organization. The challenges before the forensic organization as it moves into the Twenty-First Century include: fragmentation of the organization, winning back the constituency, professionalism in directing and maintaining a forensic program, resolving the tension between professionalism and administration, and resolving the tension between forensics and scholarship. (Four appendixes containing a list of the founding members of AFA, a statement of organizational principles, and summaries of news stories reporting the great debate about debate are attached.) (MG)

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PAST ACCOMPLISHMENTS; FUTURE CHALLENGES: CELEBRATING THE 40TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE FOUNDING OF THE AMERICAN FORENSIC ASSOCIATION

PRESENT AT THE CREATION: THE 1950s

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Presented at the Convention of
The Speech Communication Association
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PRESENT AT THE CREATION: THE 1950s

It was my good fortune to be present at the creation of the American Forensic Association. As we celebrate the 40th anniversary of our founding, I would like to share with you a little of the history of the beginning of the AFA and of the work of the AFA during the middle years of this century, then finally consider the challenges which face the AFA as we move into the Twenty First Century.

The idea for the organization that was to become the American Forensic Association was conceived at a meeting of debate coaches at a tournament at the State University of Iowa in the fall of 1948. This group, acting under the leadership of Hugo Hellman (Marquette University), felt that something should be done to meet the growing needs and interests of high school and college debate coaches. James H. McBurney (Northwestern University), President of the Speech Association of America, strongly supported the movement and appointed Second Vice President E. R. Nichols (Redlands University) to act for the SAA to cooperate in organizing an association of forensic directors. Professor Nichols made arrangements for the time and place of the organizational meeting, and issued a call for all interested persons to attend an assembly scheduled for December 27, 1949 at the Hotel Stevens in Chicago. Initially convened as the Association of Directors of Speech Activities the organization took the name of the American Forensic Association at its founding meeting. A list of the founding members may be found in Appendix A. It is worthwhile to note that the AFA was not a division of the SAA -- the concept of divisions came much later. The AFA is an independent organization that, since its inception, has met concurrently with the SAA and its successor organizations.

Hugo Hellman was elected as the first president. Five regions were established, Eastern, Southern, Mid-West, West Coast and Rocky Mountain. Governors were elected for each region and charged with the responsibility of organizing regional associations. The Rocky Mountain region was dissolved at the 1953 convention on the recommendation of the Regional Governor (Thorrel Fest, University of Colorado) and the National Council.

The major issue which faced President Hellman during his term of office was a report by the North Central Association which called for the abolition of extra curricula speech activities in the high schools. The forensic community was organized as never before, at the 1950 convention in New York all of us wore lapel badges bearing the slogan "Fight for Forensics." History records that the AFA, in cooperation with the SAA and many state speech associations, won that fight. The intensive lobbying necessary to win took up much of the first two years of the

AFA's time and energy. When I was elected as the second president of the AFA in 1951, we faced not a single issue, but the problems of maintaining and expanding an ongoing organization that would serve the needs of the forensic community over the years.

One of the first actions of my term was to create a logo which would help establish the identity of the association. I chose the symbol of a gavel superimposed on a Greek temple. This concept was executed by a commercial artist who was a student in one of my classes at Boston University. This logo has served as our symbol ever since. The original seal is reproduced in Appendix B.

Tournament debating was growing rapidly and another felt need was for a national forensic calendar. There were several forensic calendars in existence at the time. In 1947 I had established the Eastern Forensic Calendar which had a rather flexible definition of "Eastern" -- it listed tournaments from Boston to Honolulu. Beginning with the 1952 - 1953 academic year this became the AFA Tournament Calendar and the first editor was James McMonagle (Wayne State University.)

Another urgent problem was establishing a means of communication for the members. In the fall of 1952 the AFA Register was established. I served as the editor as did subsequent presidents until 1958 when John Rickey (Ohio State University) was appointed editor. At first the Register was largely a house organ devoted to association business. Soon articles on debate judging, research projects and a host of other subjects were included. By 1964 the Register became the Journal of the American Forensic Association. In 1978 JAFA was so firmly established as a scholarly publication that we once again felt the need of a house organ and established the AFA Newsletter. In 1988 JAFA was renamed Argumentation and Advocacy, the Journal of the American Forensic Association.

We felt it was important that we should state clearly what the AFA stood for. Thus at the 1953 convention we adopted the Statement of Principles. That Statement is reproduced in Appendix C.

We have in recent times debated such matters as utopian counterplans, counter warrants, comparative advantages and other issues. One of the big issues of the 1950s was the propriety of debating both sides of the proposition. As one of the young Turks of the time, I came out firmly on the side of two-man debating as it was then known. My opponent in various debates and journal articles was Brooks Quimby (Bates College) who firmly opposed having students debate both sides of the proposition. His opposition was based, in part, on the fact that President Roosevelt -- Theodore Roosevelt that is, decried young men who didn't take a position and stick to it. I won that debate when Professor Quimby, one of the great debate directors of the time, coached his team so successfully that they won a bid to the West Point tournament (as the NDT was then called) where two

man debating was mandatory. He couldn't bring himself to deny his students the opportunity of participating in the tournament so he reluctantly conceded that there was some merit to my view.

The second great debate of the 1950s focused on the 1954 - 1955 national intercollegiate debate proposition. For some two months that debate was reported on an almost daily basis in the New York Times, the Chicago Tribune and other major newspapers, sometimes on the front page. It was the subject of newspaper editorials and of one of Edward R. Murrow's "See It Now" television specials. State governors, representatives and senators, generals and admirals entered into the debate, the Secretaries of State and Defense issued statements denying they had anything to do with the debate, the FBI denied it had files on college debaters, the President of the United States devoted a portion of a press conference to the debate. Today's debaters will find it difficult to believe that in 1954 intercollegiate debate was hard news regularly covered in the national media.

In 1954 I had finished my term as AFA president and was serving as AFA representative on the Committee on Intercollegiate Debate and Discussion. Thus I was present at the creation of the Great Debate about Debate. The debate proposition that year, chosen by the democratic vote of Directors of Forensics in all of the nation's colleges, a point we were to emphasize time and again that year, was "Resolved: That the United States should extend diplomatic recognition to the communist government of China." To put matters in perspective it may be useful to recall that in 1954 Eisenhower was President and that the United States did not recognize what we came to call the People's Republic of China until 18 years later. Eisenhower's vice president, Nixon, was then president.

It all began in the fall of 1954 when the committee learned that a Nebraska teachers college refused to allow its students to debate the recognition of Red China. From there the story swiftly escalated. On October 23rd the national press reported that four Nebraska state teachers colleges refused to allow their students to debate this controversial proposition. The debate essentially ended on December 29th when the SCA and the AFA at the Chicago convention that year announced their approval of debates on the resolution. Media interest in the debate about debate waned and did not resurface until the end on the debate season in the spring when Karl Wallace estimated that the proposition had been debated some 7,000 times. I wonder how many times a national proposition is debated during the course of a season today?

A capsule review of some of the news stories that reported the great debate about debate may be found in Appendix D.

One factor that made my tenure as AFA president so enjoyable was that the AFA was the forensic organization. There was no conflict between NDT and CEDA there was just

debate. There was no conflict between debate and I. E., both fitted easily under the umbrella of forensics.

By 1953 the AFA was an established, growing and vibrant organization. At the New York convention that year the AFA sponsored seven sectional meetings, three business meetings and two executive committee meetings. Membership in 1953 had increased over 50 percent from 1952, perhaps the greatest percentage growth in any one year in our history.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

I concluded my first presentation by noting that in the 1950s the AFA was the forensic organization. Everybody who was anybody in the field of forensics worked within and supported the AFA. Everyone looked to the AFA to provide leadership and solutions to the problems of the day. That, alas, is no longer true. The challenges I see before us as we move into the Twenty First Century are:

CHALLENGE ONE: FRAGMENTATION.

The forensic community is plagued by powerful centrifugal forces that are dividing us into smaller and smaller subsets. We now have NDT, CEDA, ADA, NIET and soon there may be more. I cannot believe that this fragmentation serves the best interests of our students or the profession. This fragmentation significantly impairs the ability of the AFA to speak as a professional force representing the forensic community as a whole. I believe that it is imperative that the AFA reclaim the position it once held. Doing this will be an incredibly difficult challenge -- but it is a challenge we dare not fail to meet.

CHALLENGE TWO: WE MUST WIN BACK OUR CONSTITUENCY.

Permit me to offer some personal experience. When I was starting out in this business I sponsored a national tournament. Each year I invited the president of the university together with assorted vice presidents and deans to attend the final round. They liked what they saw and heard. They praised the accomplishments of the students. They noted with approval that this was just the sort of thing college students should be doing. Of course, I had an ulterior motive in inviting them to witness the final round. When budget time came along a little later, I reminded them of their words of praise. They saw through my game, of course, but as they approved of -- in fact admired -- the debate they had seen, each year they granted me budget increases.

Now may I ask -- how many of you today would care to invite the administrators of your university to see the final round of a tournament?

I am well aware of the arguments used to justify our hyperspecialization. These arguments may convince some of us but they do not convince our constituency. We have all heard the horror stories of debate programs being cancelled after an administrator was allowed to infiltrate our closed circle and see what was going on. We have all read the letters of former NDT stars denouncing what they find NDT doing today.

The second urgent challenge before us is that we must win back our constituency. We must conduct programs of the highest educational value that will win the admiration and support of administrators and alumni.

CHALLENGE THREE: PROFESSIONALISM

This is not a new challenge; it has been with us from the beginning: Note that the Statement of Principles concludes by stating

> We further believe that forensic activity should be under the responsible direction of a qualified faculty member, whose duty it should be to maintain and support the above principles.

Certainly a qualified faculty member is one whose faithful execution of those responsibilities leads to promotion and tenure.

In far too many high schools the real work of coaching forensics is done by college students; in far too many colleges the real work of coaching forensics is done by graduate students, law students, or non-tenure track individuals. In far too many colleges even tenure track directors find that directing forensics is treated as a minor contribution under some such category as "service to the college" which does not constitute proof of "long term usefulness to the college" which is the category that counts when tenure decisions are made.

It will take all the clout we can muster to establish and maintain that directing forensics is a serious, scholarly, vital contribution to education that must be rewarded with full recognition when promotion and tenure decisions are made.

We can't do this alone. We will need all the help we can get from the SCA and other organizations, we will have to use summer conferences, developmental conferences and all other means we can devise. Our clout on this issue is inextricably linked to challenges one and two -- this is a fight we can't win if we are fragmented and if we can't mobilize the full support of our constituency.

CHALLENGE FOUR -- THE TENSION BETWEEN PROFESSIONALISM AND ADMINISTRATION.

The AFA started as a professional organization. Over the years we acquired many administrative functions. On the one hand we seek to advance the stature of the profession by establishing standards, through research, publication and educational innovation. On the other hand we are the operator of national tournaments and other ongoing projects. How can we resolve the tension between professionalism and administration? Can we do both jobs well? How should we divide our limited resources of time, energy and money between the two?

CHALLENGE FIVE -- THE TENSION BETWEEN FORENSICS AND SCHOLARSHIP.

We began as an organization of directors of forensics. Our purpose was to address the problems that faced directors of forensics; we fought to maintain forensics in the high schools, we established a Statement of Principles, we published a national forensic calendar, we published debate ballots, we took over the National Debate Tournament when West Point laid down the responsibility for that event. In countless ways we addressed the day to day, year to year problems of directing forensic programs.

At the same time, the AFA has always promoted scholarship. We saw how the Register became JAFA and how JAFA became Argumentation and Advocacy. The AFA took the lead is establishing the National Developmental Conferences and the Summer Conferences. The AFA is rightly proud of its support and encouragement of scholarship. What is our identity? Are we an organization of Directors of Forensics seeking to solve the practical problems of that office? Or are we an organization of scholars concerned with argumentation and advocacy? Are we practitioners or theoreticians? Apparently we are both. How can we resolve the tension between forensics and scholarship? As with Challenge Four we must ask can we do both jobs well? How do we divide our limited resources of time, money and energy between the two?

These challenges are not simple or easy. They are complex and difficult. They will require our very best efforts to solve. They must be solved in the decade ahead if we are to move forward into the 21st Century.

APPENDIX A

THE FOUNDERS

The following members of the American Forensic Association joined the Association of Directors of Speech Activities, which was the immediate forerunner of the AFA, prior to December 10, 1949 and were the founders of the American Forensic Association, which was established at the annual convention of the Speech Association of America in Chicago in December 1949. The affiliations of the founders are given as of December, 1949.

* * * * *

Ahrendts, H. L., Kearney State College, Nebraska
Auer, J. J., Oberlin, College of Oberlin
Battin, Charles T. (Econ.) Coll. of Puget Sound, Tacoma
Blyton, Gifford, Univ. of Kentucky, Lexington
Bradley, Robert S., S. J., Gonzaga Univ., Spokane
Blackburn, Paul F., Loyola Univ., Los Angeles
Bland, Richard C., Stetson Univ., DeLand, Fla.
Brandes, Paul D., Univ. of Mississippi
Brembeck, Winston L., Univ. of Wisconsin, Madison
Brockshire, Adeline, Fairmount High School, Fairmount, Ind.
Buehler, E. C., Univ. of Kansas, Lawrence
Burdick, Hulda, Muskegon High School, Wisconsin
Cable, W. Arthur, Univ. of Arizona, Tucson
Carlson, Hugo A., Augustana College, Sioux Falls, So. Dak.
Carmack, Paul, Ohio State Univ., Columbus
Chenoweth, Eugene C., Indiana Univ., Bloomington
Cornelius, Brother C., FSC, Christian Bros. Acad., Syracuse
Crocker, Lionel, Denison Univ., Granville, O.
Davis, H. Barrett, Lehigh Univ., Bethlehem, Pa.
Drafahl, Elnora, New York State Teachers Coll, Albany
Fest, Thorrel B., Univ. of Colorado, Boulder
Freeley, Austin J., Boston University, Boston
Goetsch, Hal W., Blair High School, Blair, Wisconsin
Gould, Ellen H., Alabama Coll. for Women, Montevallo
Grennan, R. J., Champion High School, Prarie du Chien, Wis.
Hellman, Hugo, Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wis.
Henigan, George F., G. Washington Univ., Washington, D. C.
Holm, James N., Kent State College, Kent, O.
Irby, James N. Jr., Spring Hill College, Spring Hill, Ala.
Jacob, Bruno, Ripon College, Wis.
Johnson, Lt. Col. Chester L. U. S. Mil. Acad, West Point NY
Lahman, Carroll P., Pasadena College, Pasadena, Calif.
Martin, R. C., Lake Forest College, Lake Forest
Masten, Charles, Kansas State Teachers' Coll, Emporia
Mills, Glen, Northwestern University, Evanston, Ill.
Moulton, Eugene C., Carroll College, Waukesha, Wis.

Nagel, William G., Washington High School, Massilon, O.
Newcomer, Lloyd R., Whitman College, Walla Walla, Washington
Nichols, Alan, Univ. of So. Calif., Los Angeles, Calif.
Nichols, Egbert Ray, Univ. of Redlands, Redlands, Calif.
Nichols, E. Ray, Jr., Univ. of Oregon, Eugene
Norton, L. E., Bradley University, Peoria, Ill.
Nystrom, C. L., Wheaton College, Wheaton, Ill.
Ohnstad, Karson, J., Ripon College, Ripon, Wis.
Potter, David, Univ. of Akron, O.
Prichard, Samuel, Univ. of Maine, Oreno, Me.
Redding, W. Charles, Univ. of So. California
Ross, Maude, Miami High School, Miami, Okla.
Rowland, A. Westley, Alma College, Alma, Mich.
Schmidt, Ralph N., Utica College, Utica, N. Y.
Seal, Forrest L., DePauw University, Greencastle, Ind.
Sillars, Malcolm, Iowa State College, Ames, Ia.
Simonson, Solomon, N. Y. State Teachers' Coll., Fredonia, NY
Sixby, George L., Arkansas State Teachers' Coll., Conway
Smith, Paul W., Pasadena City Coll., Pasadena, Calif.
Sommer, Leonard, Univ. of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, Ind.
Sparling, I. H., Eureka College, Eureka, Ill,
Talley, C. Wharton, Univ. of So. Illinois, Carbondale, Ill.
Thompson, Wayne N., Chicago Undergraduate Div., Univ. of Ill
Veatch, William H., Washington State Coll. Pullman
Vinocur, Seymour M., Univ. of Washington, Seattle
Walsh, Grace, State Teachers' College, Eau Claire, Wis.
Walter, Otis M. Jr., Univ. of Houston, Houston, Texas
Wetherby, J. C., Duke University, Durham, No. C.
Wilcox, Hudson F., Enid High School, Enid, Okla.

APPENDIX B

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APPENDIX C

AMERICAN FORENSIC ASSOCIATION:

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

Recognizing that the free interchange and objective evaluation of ideas through such forensic activities as public speaking, discussion, and debate are essential to the maintenance of a democratic society, the American Forensic Association herewith records this statement of principles, which it believes should govern academic training in these disciplines.

We believe that forensic activity should create opportunities for intensive investigation of significant contemporary problems.

We believe that forensic activity should promote the use of logical reasoning and the use of the best available evidence in dealing with these problems.

We believe that forensic activity should develop the ability to select, arrange, and compose material clearly and effectively.

We believe that forensic activity should train students in the sincere and persuasive presentation of this material to the appropriate audience.

We believe that forensic activity should stimulate students to honest and original effort.

We believe that interscholastic and intercollegiate competition should be used to motivate students to their best efforts in attaining these objectives.

We further believe that forensic activities should be under the responsible direction of a qualified faculty member, whose duty it should be to maintain and suppport the above principles.

APPENDIX D

The following summaries of news stories reporting the great debate about debate is adapted from The New York Times Index of 1954 and 1955:

Nov. 16 -- West Point and Annapolis ban participation of cadets and midshipmen in debates on recognition of communist China. Military Academy holds national policy on topic is established.

Nov. 17 -- Secretary of Defense Wilson denies role in ban.

Nov. 18 -- Secretary of State Dulles denies role in ban.

Nov. 19 -- Many college presidents indicate their students will debate the national proposition.

Nov. 22 -- Speech Association president Karl Wallace says China issue as topic for debate will be studied but hints it will not be dropped.

Nov. 24 -- President Eisenhower says academy debaters should be allowed to argue any controversial issue including US recognition of communist China.

Naval Academy Superintendent says he will lift ban if so ordered.

Military Academy Superintendent says no change in policy.

Congressman warns students against taking the affirmative on China issue.

Edward R. Morrow devotes special "See It Now" program to college debate issue.

Nov. 30 -- FBI Director Hoover denies files are kept on college students debating the affirmative.

Dec. 29 -- Speech associations meeting in Chicago approve college debates on issue.